

EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION



REPORT OF: Executive Member for Growth and Development

LEAD OFFICERS: Director of Growth & Development

DATE: Thursday, 10 December 2020

PORTFOLIO(S) AFFECTED: Growth and Development

WARD/S AFFECTED: (All Wards);

KEY DECISION: Y

SUBJECT:

Public Consultation on Draft Local Plan

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council currently has a two-part local plan (made up of the Core Strategy and Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies) that sets out the land use planning strategy for the Borough up to 2026.
- 1.2 New planning regulations were published by Government in late 2017 that required local authorities to review Local Plans at least every five years from the date of their adoption. In response to the new regulations, an assessment of the two adopted local plan documents was undertaken.
- 1.3 The Council therefore approved a new Local Development Scheme in February 2018, which set out the intention to develop a single new Local Plan to replace the Core Strategy and the Local Plan Part 2. An initial “Issues and Options” public consultation was subsequently carried out in Feb-Apr 2019, and the Local Development Scheme was again updated in January 2020.
- 1.4 This stage of public consultation, on draft strategic policies and site allocations, marks a key milestone in the development of our emerging new local plan for Blackburn with Darwen. It illustrates the Council’s proposals for a “balanced growth” strategy, aiming to provide new jobs and homes as well as protecting our environment. The intention is to consult on the draft Local Plan document in January - February 2021 for a period of six weeks.
- 1.5 The consultation draft Local Plan includes the period up until 2037. The document (at Appendix A www.blackburn.gov.uk/localplan) and supporting evidence cover the following matters:
 - Vision, Strategic Objectives and Balanced Growth Strategy;
 - Core Policies (housing, economic development, town centres, climate change, health, design and infrastructure); and
 - Proposed areas for Growth, Renewal or Protection.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

1. Agree that the Local Plan Consultation Draft, and its evidence base, should be approved for consultation;
2. Delegate to the Director of Growth and Development (in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development) any editorial amendments to the Consultation Document prior to its final publication for consultation.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council currently has a two-part local plan (Core Strategy, and Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies) that sets out the land use planning strategy for the Borough up to 2026.
- 3.2 New planning regulations were published by Government in late 2017 which required local authorities to review Local Plans at least every five years from the date of their adoption. In response to the new regulations, an assessment of the two adopted local plans was undertaken. Key factors that needed to be considered with respect to the current local plans were:
 - Progress on the delivery of development set out in the Core Strategy and the Local Plan Part 2 and an evaluation of the strategy set out in the plans;
 - Government consultations including the Housing White Paper (2017) and the proposals for a Standard Housing Methodology; and
 - The publication of a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in July 2018 and updated Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) in September 2018.
- 3.3 Following consideration of these factors, the Council approved a new Local Development Scheme in February 2018 that set out the intention to develop a single Local Plan to replace the Core Strategy and Local Plan Part 2. An initial “Issues and Options” public consultation was subsequently carried out in Feb-Apr 2019, and the Local Development Scheme was again updated in January 2020.
- 3.4 In the intervening period since ‘Issues and Options’, the Council has prepared a significant package of evidence base material to assist in developing its new Local Plan. This suite of technical reports and studies, along with wider strategies of the Council and partner organisations, have helped to inform the ‘Consultation Draft’ paper at Appendix A www.blackburn.gov.uk/localplan. Additional influences have been a further revision to the NPPF (February 2019) and publication of proposed Government planning reforms set out in the Planning White Paper ‘Planning for the Future’ (August 2020). Despite potential changes to national regulations ahead, current advice from Government officials is to press on with our Local Plan preparations. The Council is therefore progressing on the best advice available to the Council at this time.
- 3.5 The next stage of public consultation, on draft strategic policies and site allocations, marks a key milestone in the development of our emerging new local plan for Blackburn with Darwen. It illustrates the Council’s proposals for a “balanced growth” strategy, aiming to provide new jobs and homes as well as protecting our environment, and invites views and suggestions. The intention is to consult on the draft Local Plan document in January - February 2021 for a period of six weeks.
- 3.6 The consultation draft Local Plan (see Appendix A www.blackburn.gov.uk/localplan) includes the period up until 2037 and covers the following main themes:
 - Vision, Strategic Objectives and Balanced Growth Strategy;

- Core Policies (housing, economic development, town centres, climate change, health, design and infrastructure); and
 - Proposed areas for Growth, Renewal or Protection.
- 3.6 Within each chapter, the key issues and proposed policies are described. Further detail on each section is set out below.

Vision, Strategic Objectives and Balanced Growth Strategy

- 3.7 The current local plan includes a vision and a number of strategic objectives that guide the overall approach to development in the Borough. The draft new Local Plan document updates the Vision and Strategic Objectives and sets out a Balanced Growth Strategy, all structured around the three priority themes of the Council's Corporate Plan for 2019-2023, which are people, place and economy.

Core Policies

- 3.8 The latest approach to deriving a housing requirement figure for the Borough is described, including consideration of the Government's Standard Housing Methodology. It is important to note that the Government has recently consulted on proposals to amend the current approach to the Standard Housing Methodology, with further details awaited.
- 3.9 National policy and guidance through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) invites Councils to consider alternative levels of housing growth to that set by the Standard Housing Methodology. The PPG identifies that there are circumstances that could justify a higher housing figure, including where growth strategies are in place that suggest a higher level of housing delivery.
- 3.10 In response to the guidance in the PPG, the Council in conjunction with Hyndburn Borough Council commissioned a Housing and Economic Needs Assessment Study (HENAS). The HENAS sets out a number of options for the two Councils to consider with respect to future housing requirements. These are set alongside the Standard Housing Methodology. The study also provides possible options for employment land requirements. As part of the work, an economic forecast was used to generate a baseline forecast and also an Economic Growth Scenario which took account of local strategies and planned investment, and as a result would be expected to lead to a growth situation with respect to new jobs created over the plan period up to 2037.
- 3.11 The Standard Housing Methodology requirement figure is currently 160 dwellings per annum for Blackburn with Darwen, however the Government's draft revised approach could increase this to around 350 dwellings per annum.
- 3.12 The Economic Growth Scenario, put forward in the Draft Plan, has considered a future where job growth in the order of around 5,000 jobs is envisaged to 2037 (58 hectares of employment land). To clarify, over the plan period there will be thousands of new jobs created or lost, and there will be labour market churn within sectors. The employment proposals in the Plan creates the potential to add a further 5,000 to the Borough's employment base over the lifetime of the Plan. The HENAS works through the potential housing need that would be associated with the Economic Growth Scenario, which suggests a potential need for 358-411 new homes each year during the plan period, i.e. around 7,000 new homes to 2037 (the figure for the full plan period 2018-2037 is 6,802–7,809 new homes). It is important to note that the two requirements, for housing and employment land, are intrinsically linked.

3.13 Further Core Policies are included within the Draft Plan, describing the approach to improved sustainable transport, design, green infrastructure, biodiversity, health, protecting heritage and importantly how the borough will increase resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Growth, Renewal or Protection

- 3.14 The Draft Plan includes a Policies Map, which broadly groups all land in the Borough into three areas: Growth, Renewal or Protection. There are further sub-divisions of each category. Policies Maps will be available to view online via an interactive map during the consultation period.
- 3.15 Within the Growth Areas, which are areas deemed suitable for substantial development, sites are allocated in order to meet the Borough's requirements for housing, employment, gypsy and traveller pitches, mixed use development or major infrastructure. Sites have been selected via a robust site selection and sustainability appraisal process, considering any reasonable alternatives. If Government proposals in the Planning White Paper are progressed then sites identified as Growth Areas within an adopted Local Plan would be granted outline planning permission in principle. Sites would still require Reserved Matters applications, Technical Details Consent or a similar application to resolve matters of detail prior to development taking place.
- 3.16 Areas for Renewal include the urban area, including Town and District Centres. These are areas deemed suitable for development where smaller scale development is appropriate. For example gentle densification, infill schemes, or regeneration initiatives.
- 3.17 Finally, Protection Areas are those which, as a result of particular environmental and/or cultural characteristics, justify more stringent development control. For example these cover the Green Belt, countryside, our green infrastructure network including designated local green spaces, heritage sites and areas of highest flood risk.
- 3.18 The document particularly highlights and supports six key schemes and ideas:
- Blackburn Growth Axis linking strategic growth sites across the Borough and beyond;
 - Darwen Town Investment Plan with the potential to deliver major growth improvements for Darwen;
 - North East Blackburn Strategic Housing Site – a new neighbourhood on the edge of the town;
 - South East Blackburn Strategic Employment Site to attract jobs and investment at a key motorway location;
 - Blackburn Town Centre Major Development Site – a unique opportunity to boost the vitality of Blackburn town centre; and
 - Infrastructure Delivery Plan – an important series of interventions to improve infrastructure for all, such as roads, schools and health facilities.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

- 4.1 Inevitably the focus will fall on the growth sites. The key point to note is that an Economic Growth Scenario is proposed, as part of a Balanced Growth Strategy, because this is considered to be the most appropriate way to support a positive economic future for the Borough. If the growth scenario is not taken forward, forecasts show that the bulk of household growth would be in those households headed by people aged 65 years or more along with a decline in households headed by people aged 16 to 64. This would inevitably have an impact on the size of the working age population in the Borough and hence the ability of employers to grow their businesses within the area. To clarify, doing nothing would lead to a forecast of working population and economic decline. Our policy-on analysis

shows that the Balanced Growth Strategy is both ambitious and evidence-based, and is the best option to support a positive economic future for the Borough.

- 4.2 A review of existing employment land illustrated that the required employment land allocations cannot all be accommodated within the urban area. Therefore a Green Belt Review has taken place and the Draft Plan proposes to amend the Green Belt boundary in order to create a new strategic employment site close to the M65.
- 4.3 The Council has investigated the continued economic case for a new strategic employment site in light of the considerable economic impacts of Covid-19. The long timeframe of the Local Plan, the current shortage of employment land supply, and the prospects for supporting both economic recovery and long term Council and LEP ambitions for growth, innovation, increased productivity and social mobility justify this approach. This is a key issue though which will need to be fully considered throughout the emergence of the new Local Plan.
- 4.4 A further area of risk at this stage is associated with a failure to develop a new Local Plan. The Core Strategy was adopted in 2011 and the evidence base that informed it is in some cases over 10 years old. It is therefore clearly in need of review, notwithstanding the requirement, introduced by regulations in late 2017, to review local plans every five years. The other main risk is around a degree of uncertainty revolving around the application of the revised Standard Housing Methodology. The recent consultation that Government has undertaken on the Standard Housing Methodology demonstrates that there is likely to be further guidance and announcements on its application.
- 4.5 A final key risk relates to the Government's recent "Planning for the Future" white paper, which may result in wide-ranging changes to the Planning System, including the procedure for the production of Local Plans. The Council will respond and adapt the emerging Local Plan in accordance with Government guidance as it becomes available. The Consultation Draft Local Plan is deliberately structured to enable the Council to react quickly to these reforms as they progress. Despite the potential changes ahead, current advice from Government officials is to press on with our Local Plan preparations. The Council is therefore progressing on the best advice available to the Council at this time.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The consultation on the Draft Local Plan marks a key stage in development of the new local plan, which (once adopted) will replace the existing two-part Local Plan. It allows the Council to receive and assess feedback on the emerging strategy and policies, therefore adapting the Plan where necessary before finalising the Plan for Examination by Government.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The consultation is to be funded by existing budgets allocated for the Local Plan.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Local Planning Authorities have a statutory requirement to produce a Local Development Plan, as described by the National Planning Policy Framework, the National Planning Practice Guidance, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This consultation on a Draft Plan forms part of the plan preparation work towards meeting this statutory requirement.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The consultation will be managed by existing resources and budgets allocated for the Local Plan within the Council's Growth Team.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision.

10. CONSULTATIONS

The public consultation regarding this document will take place for 6 weeks during January – February 2021. Consultation will be undertaken using the Council website, direct mailing, public advertisements, and via other Council communication avenues such as social media. Public events and meetings will not take place at this stage due to the COVID-19 pandemic, however it is proposed to display exhibition material within Blackburn and Darwen Markets and to carry out youth engagement work.

A key purpose of the consultation is to engage as widely as possible to determine views on the proposed Growth, Renewal and Protection areas. The extent of public engagement will therefore be significant. Each property in the Borough will receive a direct mail notification of the consultation once it has commenced. A comprehensive consultation and communications strategy has been prepared involving resource from a number of Council services. Specific youth engagement work forms a part of the consultation strategy.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

CONTACT OFFICER:	Darren Tweed
DATE:	30 November 2020
BACKGROUND PAPER:	